

# 21ST CENTURY MUSIC

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# David Starobin: Child of the Guitar Future

## MARK ALBURGER

Guitarist, record producer, and teacher David Starobin has commissioned dozens of composers to write new music for guitar. His recording label, Bridge Records, continues to carve out an important place in the contemporary music landscape.

Providentially, I met David Starobin on November 6, at a Motel 6 in Sacramento, CA, on the eve of his performance at Sacramento State's annual new music festival. We soon migrated from one bourgeois outpost to another -- an adjacent Denny's, whose power surreally ceased during our interview, leaving us in a black angelic light.

ALBURGER: That makes us a couple of *Black Angels*, I suppose. Speaking of George Crumb, is *Quest* the only piece he's written for you?

STAROBIN: He also wrote *Mundus Canis* ["Dog World"] for me. It's a wonderful piece about the different dogs that George has had over the years. The first movement is a freely accompanied guitar solo. The second is very rhythmic, the third "floaty." The fourth is rhythmic again and the fifth is pointillist.

ALBURGER: Most people would not associate George Crumb with humor.

STAROBIN: Yes, as a composer, they'd probably think of him as dark and apocalyptic, but he has a very light-hearted side as well. And, of course, as a person, he is very warm and gentle.

ALBURGER: *Mundus Canis* is a fairly new work.

STAROBIN: Yes, George wrote it in 1997. We premiered it in 1998 in France and we've travelled with it all over the place. This Friday we go to Holland.

ALBURGER: How did you and George start your association?

STAROBIN: I met George more than 30 years ago when I was a student at Peabody Conservatory. He gave a concert there and I played sitar, mandolin, and electric guitar.

ALBURGER: Does he write idiomatically for plucked neck-string instruments?

STAROBIN: He's intrigued by writing for the guitar and its relatives, and his music is very idiomatic. He likes to have the instruments in his hands when he's writing. From the beginning he knew how to write idiomatically, and as he writes more for guitar, he has pushed the possibilities on the instrument a bit. In *Quest* he wrote in an expanded idiom, and he's done even better in *Mundus Canis*.

ALBURGER: When did you first commission a piece from him?

STAROBIN: In 1970, I first asked for a piece. But he didn't write one for me until 20 years later. George has composed two pieces in the last 10 years and they've both been for me. I feel a bit guilty. He is now working on a new piano piece, however.

ALBURGER: And you've been recording George Crumb pieces as well.

STAROBIN: We're producing a CD set of George's complete output -- the recordings are just about all new. The most recent one has *Night of the Four Moons*, *Lux Aeterna*, and *Apparition*.

ALBURGER: You're recording the orchestral music, too?

STAROBIN: Yes. We've been working with the Warsaw Philharmonic and the group is just terrific. We have a spectacular recording of *Starchild*. *Haunted Landscape* will be released soon, along with *Variazione*, which is an early piece that is just beautiful. *Echoes of Time and the River* will also come out. George was never really satisfied with the Louisville Symphony recording, because the string section was a very small group which was simply amplified to make it sound larger. Of course, when producing a new recording, you never can really tell what's going to happen, but at least we've got the right forces to do a great job.

ALBURGER: Are other early George Crumb recordings as problematic?

STAROBIN: The first recording of *Haunted Landscape* was a disaster, although it was not the fault of the performers: Arthur Weisberg and one-half of the New York Philharmonic. The recording technicians intercut a studio performance with a live performance, due to studio time limits. Up to our recordings, none of George's orchestral pieces had really been given justice.

ALBURGER: Will you be doing a new recording of *Ancient Voices of Children*?

STAROBIN: Yes. Sometime in mid-2001. I don't look forward to recording *Ancient Voices*. Jan DeGaetani really owned that piece. We'll find the best singer, but I don't expect to top that Nonesuch recording. From a technical standpoint, we can get a better sound quality with today's digital audio but... We just recorded *Music for a Summer Evening* and *Zeitgeist*.

ALBURGER: You founded Bridge Records.

STAROBIN: Yes, with my wife Becky.

ALBURGER: How do you keep the enterprise going?

STAROBIN: We're just glorified beggars, really. We're certainly not in the record business for the money, that's for sure. Somehow we manage to eke out an existence.

ALBURGER: And you've been doing this for some time.

STAROBIN: Bridge is almost in its 20th year. We started in early 1981. I had been making some recordings for different labels. I met George Mendelssohn, who was running Vox. I said, "George, I've got this piece... and this piece... and this piece..." And he said, "David, all this new music -- I can't sell it." I asked, "Would it make any difference if I showed you the scores?" And he responded, "No difference." So I learned then that if you want to talk about the music, you have to talk with someone who's interested. So I produced on my own, *New Music with Guitar*, Volume I. It was three LPs. The second recording project I did sold me on what I was doing. The guitar project was good and it did have some success, but the next was something I developed with Jan DeGaetani and Gilbert Kalish. It was George Crumb's *Gnomic Variations* and *Apparition* and some Ives songs. I asked them to record the pieces on my label - I didn't expect them to say yes, but they did, and that gave me such a charge! These very respected colleagues were respecting what I was doing.

ALBURGER: Since that time you've been working with all sorts of well-known people, as can be seen on your recent album, *Newdance*.

STAROBIN: Many of the composers on that CD are those with whom I've had longstanding relationships. My best friend, William Bland, still writes for me. The piece on the album written by Mario Davidovsky is not the first one he wrote for me.

ALBURGER: Did he write one of the *Synchronicities* for you?

STAROBIN: Yes, and also a chamber piece called *Festino*. As with the George Crumb works, we're also focussing on recording Davidovsky pieces. There are not enough recordings of his music, and they're really needed! George has at least had most of his works recorded; Mario hasn't. He's one of the most scantily recorded major composers! We did the first recording exclusively devoted to Mario's works, and we're working on two more. I really believe in his music. Many of the realizations of his music that we're doing will be first recordings.

ALBURGER: What would you say are the extremes on the *Newdance* CD?

STAROBIN: The extremes would be Jorge Morel -- he's a Latin guitarist who writes really elegant music, including our recording of *Reflections Latinos* (1997) -- and Milton Babbitt, who writes not unidiomatically, but uses guitar to suit his purposes in such pieces as *Danci* (1996). Milton composes the way he thinks. I love his mind and his sense of humor. All of his personality comes through in his guitar writing. I have a great time playing his music. Other guitarists might say Milton's guitar writing is not idiomatic, but I would say that idiom is simply an outgrowth of language.

ALBURGER: What do you find most enjoyable in your work?

STAROBIN: What I love most is finding a composer who can express a voice through an instrument. I certainly have favorite composers by now. Milton, William, George, Mario, and Jorge are favorites. Paul Ruders is a favorite -- he's a giant, because he's able to move his language into all sorts of spheres. He has a new opera called *The Handmaid's Tale*. We heard it in Denmark; it's spectacular! It's one of those great experiences that I now want to hear in recording.

ALBURGER: Are you presently exclusively devoted to new music?

STAROBIN: I also do 19th-century music on period instruments. I'm a collector of unusual guitars. Many of the instruments in my collection would be of no use to anyone but myself, but I'm fascinated with them! Often I'll play concerts of half contemporary music and half period pieces.

ALBURGER: What about tonight's performance in the Sacramento festival?

STAROBIN: It will be an all-contemporary program, of course, including three premieres, including one by Dusan Bogdanovich -- a wonderful piece!

ALBURGER: What are the other premieres?

STAROBIN: They will be by Brian Johansen and Richard Wernick. The Wernick (he's not a guitarist) is a difficult kind of writing. This is his second guitar work, and he's writing a guitar concerto at present. Both of his guitar pieces are actually studies for the upcoming new chamber concerto that he is writing for me.

ALBURGER: You must have other commissions in the works as well.

STAROBIN: Yes, including Ruders's new *Paganini Variations*.

ALBURGER: Is Crumb also writing you a new piece?

STAROBIN: George is working very slowly these days. He doesn't want to repeat himself. *Quest* took six years to complete, during which time he felt very morose about composition. I remember him saying, "I'm writing every day and then at the end of the day I throw out what I'm writing." Right now he's working on -- it will be wonderful -- variations on a Thelonious Monk composition.

ALBURGER: That should be different.

STAROBIN: Yes! And *Quest* and *Mundus Canis* are very different from each other, and from earlier Crumb pieces. *Quest* is scored for guitar, soprano sax, double bass, two pianos, and percussion (including a hammered dulcimer). The last movement -- almost half the piece -- is very beautiful. Whether it breaks new ground or not (probably not), it's very beautiful.

ALBURGER: Has it been a challenge for you playing other instruments, like the sitar and banjo, in George's music?

STAROBIN: I haven't minded at all playing other instruments in his music. All his writing is idiomatic and fun.

ALBURGER: What are you recording at present?

STAROBIN: We've just recorded Melissa Wagner's *Concerto for Flute, Strings, and Percussion*. This CD is backed by flute music by Paul Ruders.

ALBURGER: What do you think of Melissa's music?

STAROBIN: Her pieces are promising.

ALBURGER: You have yet a third aspect of your career besides guitar playing and recording.

STAROBIN: I also teach. As a matter of fact, I have to fly back tonight right after the concert. I teach at the Manhattan School of Music.

ALBURGER: Has this been a long-term activity for you?

STAROBIN: I've been teaching since I got out of school. But that's the first thing that I would love to leave. But I do enjoy teaching there, nevertheless.

ALBURGER: How did you first come to the guitar and new music?

STAROBIN: I started playing when I was 7. My parents were music lovers, and I received a terrific music education initially just by listening. My father was always playing records (he also played the piano and the recorder). I was given a good instrument early on and learned to play chamber music -- most guitarists, of course, are brought up to be soloists. When I was 11 or 12, I played in a rock band (Beatles and before), but I always played classical as well. At 13, a friend played me some Varèse, and that listening experience changed my life. Soon after that, I was listening to Messiaen, Stravinsky, the whole modernist canon. In college, I had two composer friends: William Bland and Ronald Roxbury. Ron died of AIDS in 1986, unfortunately. He was a truly original composer, writing in his own wonderfully graphic octotonic language. He wrote magnificent chamber music and opera. At one point in my college career, we had Earle Brown as Composer in Residence. He was a great influence! My composer friends and I started an improvisation ensemble. We did all of Earle's pieces from the 50's and 60's.

ALBURGER: Are you a composer yourself?

STAROBIN: I did a bit of composing, but... I have a kid brother who is a composer. Composition was something he just had to do. I never felt the compulsion. I'm a thousand times better as a "recomposer" -- as a realizer of the compositions of others. I've really shied away from composition myself over the years.

ALBURGER: What has been the most fulfilling aspect of your career?

STAROBIN: The pieces that have been composed for me are what's most important to me in my career. These pieces justify my time on earth! For instance, I was able to get Elliott Carter to write me *Shard*, a piece that breaks new ground for the instrument. I know that 200 years from now some new guitarists will be saying, "Wow!" I've sat back and said, "Isn't this great?!" so many times -- with the Ruders *Concerto*, the Crumb albums...

ALBURGER: How many Crumb albums will there be?

STAROBIN: There will be 14 or 15 albums total.

ALBURGER: And how do you determine what your next recording project will be?

STAROBIN: We try to look at composers that are notable and under-represented in recording catalogues, such as Gunther Schuller and Andrew Imbrie. With both of those two -- and Davidovsky, Babbitt, Ruders, Wernick, and so on -- we want to record more pieces.

ALBURGER: But George Crumb seems a special case, since you're recording his complete output.

STAROBIN: I've always felt that George's music was not recognized or promoted as much as it should be. His reputation has suffered in recent years. He has no friends at the New York Times. He has not been written at all favorably in many quarters, yet his music continues to be performed. He's performed more than just about anyone in new music. Musicians and listeners really like the music. And that's just about the bottom line for what makes any composer great.

# Concert Reviews

## Audible Image / Visible Sound

PAMELA Z

Donald Swearingen's *Living Off The List*. September 23, A Traveling Jewish Theater, San Francisco, CA. Repeated September 24.

Within the community of electroacoustic composer/performers, we often chucklingly categorize ourselves as either being "knob twiddlers" or otherwise. Knob twiddlers are the ones who sit in front of an audience at a table covered with little black boxes wired together with a maze of black spaghetti (or these days a single black laptop with a glowing white upside-down apple) and fill the room with synthesized or sampled sounds using only the subtle motions required to type commands, move faders, or "twiddle" knobs. Many of us have been gladly attending these sorts of concerts for years (some for 20, 30, even 40), and are not at all bothered by the lack of visual stimuli to correspond with the sounds being presented. One goes to this kind of concert to listen. And perhaps to do so in the company of the other 30 people we see at every electronic music event.

But, for some people, it is desirable or even necessary to have some kind of visual or theatrical element to look at while experiencing a live music event. With acoustic music, they argue, one sees the motion and effort of the players as they strike, strum, blow, or bow their instruments (although I have seen some keyboard players who don't look nearly as expressive as artists like Carl Stone or John Bischoff as they intently caress the touchpads of their Powerbooks!) Still, perhaps to fill this need, or perhaps to simply satisfy the scientist-like curiosity that many of us seem to have, over the years there have been a number of composer/performers developing and/or using gesture controllers in performance. Donald Swearingen is one such artist. Swearingen says that his choice of using these controllers is not at all a backlash against "knob-twiddling", but, for him, music is a very physical thing and these controllers are one way to express that physicality. In his latest solo performance work, *Living Off The List*, he concocted a thoroughly satisfying feast of sound, light, motion, and image using sampled texts (read mostly by members of the companies A Traveling Jewish Theater and Strange Fruit) and found images from various sources. In this ode to the endless long lists we all make, the instrumentation consisted of numerous sensor-based MIDI controllers (mostly designed and created by the composer), two Macintosh computers running MAX MSP and Director, and two video monitors. Amidst all of this technology squeezed onto the Theater's small stage, he created an engaging work that came across as theatrical, intimate, and very human.

Moving from one little station to the next, Swearingen used calm, direct gestures to control both the sound and the video images. One moment he was wearing his MIDI Jacket and raising, lowering, and bending his arms to trigger samples of Corey Fischer reading "to do" lists. The next he was filling the air with Albert Greenberg's vocalizations by "plucking" the red, luminous "strings" of his laser harp. Then, he was releasing little bits of Naomi Newman reading from fortune cookies and Annie Kunjappi reading Richard Feinman anecdotes by alternately shielding and exposing an array of small light sensors with his hands.

Generally, he was controlling both audio and video, so that changes in the sound were often accompanied by simultaneous changes in the imagery. In one rather humorous sequence, he used small flashlights on a row of sensors along the floor to trigger images of familiar yellow and black safety and warning signs while simultaneously triggering blood-curdling screams. He did this repeatedly with various innocuous-looking signs (like the one with the little stick figure slipping on a wet floor, or a pair of rubber gloves warning of the presence of toxic chemicals), each instance soliciting unbridled belly laughs from the audience. It felt as though he could have continued doing it indefinitely and people would have never stopped laughing uproariously, but he eventually transitioned into another segment, giving the audience a moment to catch their breath.

Though the evening was often lighthearted in tone, there were also segments which were dark and thought-provoking. There was a segment which mounted one morbid statistic upon another, in a detailed account of how many people had died from what causes, and how those numbers compared to the number of people still living. The entire work was grouped into four separate movements, each of which was introduced by a short spoken bit performed live by the composer. For these little introductions, he used a pitch-to-MIDI converter to translate the rhythm of his speech into harmonically varied, pitched material. In one of them, for example, he "spoke the blues," while in another he spoke a Mozart piano concerto.

Though the visual elements were constant throughout the evening, many of the video images were simple (often showing animated text), and Swearingen's demeanor on stage was generally casual and pedestrian. These elements were well-integrated, and the piece was clearly theatrical, but the star of the show was unquestionably the audio art. Donald Swearingen has a gift for making sampled text come off sounding very lyrical. His roots as a pianist and keyboardist continue to influence his sound even though he no longer uses the keyboard as his main controller. And, even though his sound sources are largely text and household objects, he performs them with a composerly, pianistic flair. One has the refreshing feeling that all the theatrical elements and complex performance systems are not being used as a smoke screen to mask the lack of anything below the surface (as is often the case in this era of tech-seduction), but rather as an elegant vehicle for delivering a very delicate load of precious cargo. *Living Off the List*, which was performed without an intermission, was just long enough that the audience felt comfortably full at its conclusion, and many of them remained for an informal, after-concert talk with the composer.

## Alea III

DAVID CLEARY

Alea III. October 25, Tsai Performance Center, Boston University, Boston, MA.

The October 2000 Alea III concert proved true to its title *Everywhere*; composers from many parts of the world, ranging as far afield as Iran, Finland, and the U.S., were represented here. But rather than fulfilling some sort of nationalist quota, this evening boasted several wide-ranging examples of unqualified excellence.



Jonathan Kramer's *Remembrance of a People*, for string quintet and piano, is a splendid listen, a commemoration of the Holocaust that proves heartfelt and highly charged while avoiding histrionics or self-indulgence. Tonally oriented though only sometimes triadic, the piece possesses the brooding depth of Shostakovich's best late music. Perhaps most fascinating here is Kramer's subversion of standard four-part sonata constructs; while containing a slow second movement and waltz-like third movement flanked by fast tempo bookends, this selection otherwise bears only tenuous similarity to 19th century chamber chestnuts.

Reza Vali's *Folk Songs (Set No. 15)*, for mixed quintet, proves equally seditious, with the target here being folk song. Vali's melodic ideas suggest kinship with indigenous Persian music, but are handled in a thoroughly modern manner, replete with microtonal inflections, complex drones, and special effects like sing-and-play flute (shades of Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson!). Despite falling prey to the "fast movements short/slow movements long" trap at times, this is an excellent entry, exhibiting a striking and unusual sound world.

*Rebonds*, a solo percussion work by Iannis Xenakis, is obsessive yet flawlessly paced, full of fire and expertly put together. Each of its two movements makes much of what amounts to intricate variants on a basic phrase -- yet the piece never bores for a second, delineating a well-measured long-range sense of unfolding.

The most disjointed item on the program was *Yta I*, by Esa-Pekka Salonen. But even here, vice is made into a virtue; sections of disjunct, atonal writing serve as a refrain, grounding passages that respectively explore whole-tone, octave-derived, pandiatonic, and extended-technique material. And Salonen's writing for solo alto flute takes full advantage of the instrument's potential, exploring traditional and experimental sounds with equal skill.

Less successful was Sergei Slonimsky's mixed trio, *Lamento Furioso in Memoriam Edison Denisov*. Its scattered progression of material and wide-ranging harmonic language, reminiscent at times of Schnittke, suggests no existence of a clear overall plan such as that encountered in *Yta I*. Sadly, *Lamento* came across as eccentric and wandering.

Performances were, by and large, strong and effective. Particular mention goes to Craig McNutt for his feisty, driven version of *Rebonds* and Jacqueline DeVoe's thoughtful, nicely paced playing in the Salonen. Theodore Antoniou ably conducted the ensemble in the Kramer and Vali selections.

Generally speaking, this was a much-enjoyed round-the-world tour, received with thanks.

## Collage Music

### DAVID CLEARY

*Collage New Music*. October 29, C. Walsh Theatre, Suffolk University, Boston, MA.

October's Collage New Music Ensemble concert spoke with a distinctly Italian accent, featuring brief but choice selections by two of that country's primary 20th-century masters and a major setting of Italian poems by one of America's most distinguished composers.

The big item on this evening's concert was the world premiere of John Harbison's complete four-part cycle *Motetti di Montale* (2000) in its soprano and chamber ensemble version. Eugenio Montale's acerbic but evocative verse is perfectly mirrored here, the first books exhibiting a fascinating variety of intensely bilious musical moods while the last are more world-weary in feel. Song 19, "La canna," is particularly beautiful to hear. Harbison's Italian text setting is flawless, his instrumental accompaniments are varied and imaginative, and his vocal writing is effective and idiomatic. Conductor David Hoose drew a masterful performance from the nine-piece chamber group. The decision to split this lengthy work between two strongly contrasting mezzo-sopranos, while a bit surprising, proved fortuitous. Janice Felty sang Books One and Two with a splendidly lean, focused tone, exquisite diction, and comparatively reserved stage demeanor, all of which perfectly suited the bitter feel of the music. Featuring a plush tone quality, more dramatic stage presence, and somewhat mushier word enunciation, Margaret Lattimore's voice was especially appropriate for the Weltschmerz of this work's latter half.

Surrounding Harbison's piece, like tiny but lustrous stars flanking the tail of a giant comet, were two mid-century classics by renowned Italian tonemeisters. Luciano Berio's *Sequenza II* (1963) imaginatively pushes the envelope on harp technique while readily acknowledging the things that sound classically good on this instrument; its special accomplishment is to smoothly integrate these two extremes, not for a minute sounding avant garde for its own sake. The piece cleverly exhibits a wide gamut of sound (ranging from gossamer filigree and plucked harmonics to sweeping glissandi and forceful percussive effects) while at the same time organizing the material into a lucid structural format. Ann Hobson Pilot's performance was top-drawer, keenly attuned to the harp's colorist possibilities while nicely balancing passion and control. *Piccola Musica Notturna* (1954/61) by Luigi Dallapiccola is a delight, winsome and melodic enough to gain the heart of the most ardent serialist detractor. This fine listen consists mainly of lyric and lovely material, periodically punctuated by more strident cadential passages. Hoose led his eight charges in a warm, sensitive, and thoughtful presentation.

Congratulations go to the Collage group for a fruitful, well-presented visit to sunny Mediterranean musical climes.

## Lap Symphony

### WALT ERICKSON

Warren Burt's *Antipodean Collection: A Laptop Symphony* (2000), presented by collaboration among the Electronic Music Foundation (EMF), Engine 27, Composers' Forum, Inc. November 4, Engine 27, New York, NY.

Warren Burt's performance of his *Antipodean Collection: A Laptop Symphony* was a warm and thoughtful experience that lacked the academic pretension many might expect to find at a concert of its kind. This nine-movement work was "played" by Burt on his computer as well as a set of faders and other gear. Throughout, Burt charmed the audience with his warm voice and his sharing of funny anecdotes along with his unique and interesting experiences, giving us an evening of beauty, delight, and growth.

*Voicechords II (No. 4)* was probably the most accessible piece on the program. Using text by the New Zealand poet Rewi Alley, the piece fused a tonal, jazz-like underpinning, combined with sophisticated electronic noise, that Burt deftly guided through his sound system. The favorite was *Looking Towards Antarctica (A Noise Passacaglia)*, which contained an affective tape recording of a conversation between Burt and his friend, the Australian writer, Sarah Wood. While looking out at the ocean on the southern coast of Australia, Burt asks Wood what lies beyond their sight. Wood responds by saying that, except for a few islands, it's Antarctica.

Though far from New York City, the southern coast of Australia didn't really seem that far away. Burt, who is originally from upstate New York but moved to Australia in 1975, uses his adopted homeland and its location as major themes. However, he seems to exemplify a very New York downtown compositional personality, making him a perfect fit for this series of concerts that included music ranging from Cage to Earle Brown and others.

Again, it was Burt's warmth that permeated throughout the program and let us enjoy his performance. In introducing *No. 7, Fractal Follies*, Burt explained and played examples of fractals so that everyone could easily understand. When the piece was finally played, the audience embraced its strangeness. Finally, as he introduced us to the text and related concepts that would be used in *No. 8, Five Tango Permutations*, and *No. 9, Ten Windy Oscillators*, Burt joyfully announced, "It's time for the poetry hour, folks!"

Such a refreshing display of personality accompanying music that normally makes its living inside the esoteric made this event a pleasure to attend.

## Virtual Opera

### DAVID CLEARY

David Rodwin's *Virtual Motion: A One-Man Hyper-Opera*. November 9, Mobius, Boston, MA. Through November 11.

Young composers with a keen desire to write opera these days normally find the going tough -- stage works are costly to put on and opera companies are notoriously squeamish about presenting anything besides standard repertoire. *Virtual Motion*, by David Rodwin, is perhaps the ultimate practical solution to this dilemma. Its bare-bones staging requires only a few chairs, a stool, a swivel footrest, and a large air-filled rubber ball. The music and much of the dialogue/singing are on prerecorded tape, lighting effects are minimal, and the cast consists of one person (the composer, in this case). But, while stripped down, this opera is not a slapdash experience.

Rodwin's music is constructed through employment of samples, synthesized sounds, and digitally recorded live instruments. It's profoundly eclectic, drawing from practically every style imaginable: a wild grab bag -- with subtle nods to Meredith Monk, Philip Glass, Brian Eno, and Laurie Anderson -- employing Broadway, Latin, African, and rock idioms. A particularly striking example in Act One deftly blends subtle elements of rap and march music. Like Glass's mature oeuvre, the musical textures are often constructed from pattern-style figures, but neither the scoring nor the manner in which the patterns are employed overtly suggest this process composer. The composer's mastery of styles is readily apparent; among other things, the exuberantly catchy pop number sung by the opera's hero near the end of each act suggests Rodwin might be capable of writing quality salable chart fare if he chose to do so.

The story line, concerning the short and rather unhappy life of a young man, is presented in fragmented, non-linear fashion. An able rondo-like construct is built into the libretto and bolstered by the music, with the hero's death in a car crash providing the opera's recurrent focal point. What makes it all work is the vulnerable, deeply human feel to the scenes presented; many combine warmth with humorous elements, the latter often suggested through liberal employment of cartoon style sound effects. The piece's pattern-oriented music is nicely mirrored through frequent looped use of text and visual gesture. And despite its solidly avant-garde conception, this is indeed an opera in more than name only. Oblique ties to traditional examples of the genre include a tableau-oriented construction that descends from Berlioz and Mussorgsky, as well as periodic appearances of focal melodic selections (though employing pop or Broadway style numbers rather than anything conventional) surrounded by spoken sections that all have their roots in German singspiel. Perhaps most striking in this regard is a choreographed depiction of swimming marine organisms (cleverly delineated by use of hand-held glow-in-the-dark bracelets on a blackened stage) that imaginatively and economically updates the notion of operatic dance interludes found from Lully to Borodin.

Rodwin's performance is highly effective, delightfully depicting the eccentric charm of his opera's various characters. His acting style suggests a loose-limbed, less-stylized version of mime perhaps most reminiscent of vintage Red Skelton. While not possessing a classically trained voice, Rodwin sings in an appealing Broadway pop fashion and effectively lip-synchs to the prerecorded tape on other occasions.

*Virtual Motion*, hip without ever being pretentious, is ample proof that a do-it-yourself approach to opera can work wonderfully. Very much enjoyed.

## Longy Longitude

### DAVID CLEARY

Longitude. November 15, Edward M. Pickman Concert Hall, Longy School of Music, Cambridge, MA.

This concert came up with the excellent idea of programming music by Aaron Copland and three composers of the following generation who were mentored by him. And while the works by the comparative youngsters presented this evening sometimes showed minimal sonic kinship to the older master, it demonstrated that Copland's taste was broad-based, happily able to support non-concurrent aesthetic approaches.

*Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1942) is yet another nearly forgotten gem by the unjustly neglected Harold Shapero. The pitch language used is more dissonant than that of most American-based neoclassicists, redolent of Stravinsky's more clangorous entities. The piece's rather fragmented nature makes for fascinating listening, with surprises in texture, unfolding, and harmony lurking around every corner, and lending special interest to the work's delineation of classical constructs. It's a must for any fiddle player who wants to try something special away from the well-blazed trail of standard repertoire.

Hints of the great Russian's output also color *Three Poems of Yeats* (1940, rev. 1987), by Arthur Berger; but found here, too, are glimpses of Pierrot Lunaire and Ravel's late vocal compositions (an impression aided in no small part by Berger's voice, flute, clarinet, and cello scoring). Clean linear writing, sparkling text setting, and natty orchestration can be counted among this fine work's attributes. Berger's *Ode of Ronsard* (1987) belongs to this composer's later serial period, but while dissonant verticals are the rule, dryness is not. In fact, when played properly, this is a warmly expressive selection sporting a nicely developed sense of line and color, a fact not lost on its performers this evening. Longy faculty Jane Struss (mezzo-soprano) and Brian Moll (piano) gave it a reserved, lyric, and sensitively nuanced presentation, Struss's smoky voice imparting a poignant, haunting quality to the piece that pleased greatly.

Leon Kirchner's *Music for Twelve* (1985) is a strange but compelling entity. With its lush, post-romantic sound world (oscillating between atonality and more triadic sonorities) and muscular, dramatic melodic writing, this composition comes across as a highly personal updating of music in the vein of Schoenberg's *Chamber Symphony No. 1*. This listener found the work's formal construction hard to catch on first hearing, but greatly enjoyed its hearty energy, variegated scoring, and vigorous risk-taking.

Copland was represented here by the *Piano Quartet* (1950), one of this composer's non-populist pieces shot through with serial elements. It's one of his finest efforts, sharing the rarified atmosphere populated by such special worthies as the *Piano Variations* and *Appalachian Spring*.

Performances by the student players of Longitude ranged from quite good to first-rate, with especially fine efforts put forth on behalf of the Copland and Kirchner entries. Ensemble director Eric Sawyer, proving himself an able mentor to his young charges, led the outgoing presentation of the latter.

## Merrill Listens

### DAVID CLEARY

*The Merrill Recital: Violinist Rolf Schulte.* November 16, John Knowles Paine Concert Hall, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

After hearing Nicolo Paganini play the violin at an 1820's Vienna-based concert, Franz Schubert observed, "I have heard an angel sing." This reviewer was in an equally rhapsodic mood at the close of Harvard's recent Merrill Recital featuring fiddler extraordinaire Rolf Schulte. The program was a fascinating and unusual one, featuring the premiere of a work by a major composer of our time, some European serial classics, and a late 19th-century rarity.

Donald Martino's *Romanza* (2000) for solo violin (commissioned by Schulte) received its first performance. Technical demands here, while formidable, are always tastefully done, kept in harness by the work's prevailingly warm, lyric sound world. Containing melodic ideas that are lovingly sculpted throughout, the piece speaks with a fetching, fluid ease that is most appealing. And the work's formal layout provides a clever take on variation procedure. It's a fine listen. The other recent entity, *Three Interludes* (1996) by Richard Wilson, proved an intriguing and worthy counterbalance. The first two movements, wry and witty character pieces, possess an Algonquin Round Table level of sophistication, leavened effectively by the finale's quality of sighing acceptance.

The performance of Arnold Schoenberg's *Phantasy*, Op. 47, was a revelation. This mercurial composition's appeal has frankly eluded this critic in the past. While not ignoring the piece's wildly fragmented nature, Schulte and pianist James Winn always maintained a keen sense of line and larger formal organization while acknowledging the work's bedrock sense of twisted hyper-expressionism.

*Vier Stuecke*, Anton Webern's Op. 7, came off like sparkling dewdrops, putting forth this selection's polished, hushed purity while not giving its periodic turbulent passages short shrift. Schulte's and Winn's careful ensemble communication here resulted in chamber playing at its very best.

Luigi Dallapiccola's excellent *Due Studi* (1947) allowed the players to essay an exercise in large-scale contrasts. The opening stylized "Sarabande" was bewitchingly expressive, ultimately giving way to a dynamic, intensely exciting "Fanfara e Fuga" that betrayed no sense whatever of textbook dryness.

Ferruccio Busoni's *Sonata No. 2 in E Minor* (1898), op. 36a, is a strange, eccentric entity. Cast in a fully ripe, post-Wagnerian vein, the work's scattered construction, formidable duration, and larger-than-life manner of speech make for tough listening. Schulte and Winn confronted it head on -- playing it in an emotive, gorgeous manner while avoiding gooey sentimentality -- coming very close indeed to concocting a gourmet meal from meat-loaf fixings. A brief encore selection from Igor Stravinsky's *Suite Italienne* proved a simple, uncluttered, and welcome joy.

Schulte's playing was heavenly, featuring a sound that was both astonishingly full and as concentrated as a laser beam. His finger technique, which got an especially strenuous workout in the Busoni, was spotless, his bow arm was stone sturdy, and his intonation was perfect. Winn proved the ideal accompanist, playing in a clean and sensitive, yet demonstrative fashion. This was a splendid evening of music making.

## Gunning for Schuller

### DAVID CLEARY

*Gunther Schuller's 75th-Birthday Concert*, with the MIT Wind Ensemble. November 18, Kresge Auditorium, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.

Gunther Schuller's career has been astonishingly multifaceted, embracing classical, jazz, and ragtime idioms while acting as composer, conductor, performer, educator, writer, music publisher, and record producer. Fittingly enough, this concert in celebration of Schuller's 75th birthday traversed a wide range of scoring and style.

This critic first reviewed Schuller's *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* (1999) at a New England Conservatory concert in March. A second hearing confirmed those positive initial impressions, additionally bringing home the notion that this piece is tidy and succinct. Its unusual formal construction also held up well under further scrutiny. Saxophonist Kenneth Radnofsky and pianist John McDonald gave it a splendidly memorable performance.

*Music for Young People* (1991), a mixed quartet, shows its composer introducing more dissonant idioms to student-aged audiences. Each of its five movements is a character study with a vivid title that provides a tangible handle for neophyte listeners to grasp. The music, while approachable within this sound world, does not patronize its audience. And clever cognoscenti touches can be found as well; for example, "The Swan," is scored for Saint-Saens's cello/piano pairing, yet pointedly avoids the earlier example's expressive sentimentality -- this swimming bird is brooding and mystical, with a distinctly minimalist bent. The student foursome from the MIT Chamber Music Society did quite well by it.

The other two official concert selections showed radically different takes on writing for large wind ensemble. *Blue Dawn into White Heat* (1996) neatly integrates jazz elements into a concert band circumstance, its solo improvisation sections for trombone, trumpet, saxophone, and rhythm section sounding perfectly natural in this element. It's a friendly work possessing great appeal. *Song and Dance* (1990) uses the large group as backing for a violin soloist. The wind melodies in the opening movement have a soulful pop-like quality subtly reminiscent of the slow movement to Gershwin's *Concerto in F* (though the violin part is "straighter," consisting of warm, long-held notes), while the lively finale conjures up fiddle music that updates everything from Irish reels to Western swing. Formal use here, as in most of Schuller's oeuvre, is clever and original. The first movement's exploded take on classic double variation structure is especially striking. Violin soloist Young-Nam Kim played skillfully, while Frederick Harris, Jr. ably led the MIT Wind Ensemble.

In addition, numerous welcome "birthday surprises" were sprinkled throughout the program. These included a first-rate presentation of Schuller's jazz selection *Lament for M* (featuring a stunning solo sax turn by Ricky Ford and fine playing by bassist Bruce Gertz, flautist Sue-Ellen Herschman-Tcherepnin, and drummer Joe Hunt), a top-shelf piano improvisation by Third-Stream legend Ran Blake, and a delightful birthday bonbon for solo violin by MIT faculty member Peter Child.

At concert's end, the audience gave Schuller a standing ovation -- a well-deserved "hats off" to this talented musician of many hats. It was an excellent evening.

## Deja Copland

### MARK ALBURGER

Marin Symphony presents an all-Copland concert. November 21, Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

It was deja vu all over again at Veterans Auditorium on November 21 when Gary Sheldon and the Marin Symphony presented an all-Aaron-Copland program, commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the Brooklyn native's birth -- a centennial well acknowledged in the local music scene. As in the recent San Francisco opening gala, this concert began with one of the composer's Latin American fantasies, in this case *El Salon Mexico*, a disarmingly simple yet sophisticated and witty work. The Marin Symphony gave the piece a fine, sturdy reading.

Also solid were English hornist Laura Chrisp and trumpeter Carole Klein, in a warm rendition of *Quiet City*, where Sheldon's strings also shined. This led to the novelty of the evening, the 8-minute *Caprice for Violin and Orchestra*, winningly interpreted by soloist Peggy Brady. The program notes billed this as "an arrangement of the third movement of . . . *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1943)"; Gerald Elias's orchestration of this music, while often in a Coplandesque style, sometimes suggested a more contemporary voice. One was left hungry for a full orchestral setting of the complete sonata.

Once again, as in a recent Michael Tilson Thomas bill, Copland's *Third Symphony* filled the second half of the proceedings. Sheldon made a strong case for this powerful, if overwrought work, and perhaps a second hearing, from further back in the concert hall, softened this reviewer toward the composition's excesses. The symphony still tries too hard to please, and Copland's own thou-doth-protest-too much comments are telling:

"Regarding my *Third Symphony*, one aspect ought to be pointed out: It contains no folk or popular material. During the late twenties, it was customary to pigeonhole me as a composer of symphonic jazz, with emphasis on jazz. I have also been catalogued as a folklorist and purveyor of Americana. Any reference to jazz or folk material in this work is purely unconscious."

Yeah, yeah. But like Bartók, Copland lived and breathed indigenous music, and even in this less-than-completely-satisfying work, our Dean of American Music pleases. As did the Marin Symphony in this admirable performance.

# Record Review

## Sound Programming

### MICHAEL MCDONAGH

Michelle Makarski. *Elogio per un' ombra*. Giuseppe Tartini. *Sonata #7 in A*. Luigi Dallapiccola. *Due Studi*. Goffredo Petrassi. *Elogio per un'ombra*. Luciano Berio. *Due Pezzi*. George Rochberg. *Caprice Variations Nos. 6, 12, 27, and 37*. Anonymous. *Lamento di Tristano*. Michelle Makarski, violin; Thomas Larcher, piano. ECM New Series 1712.

You can't just hang a picture at any height on a wall and hope that it makes sense, because images should fit into a room and create some tension, too. Musicians face a similar challenge: what to play and in what order. Both the visual and sound arts make decisions based on color, weight and scale, and context changes perception. American violinist Michelle Makarski has a knack for making provocative programs. Her last ECM CD, *Caioine*, included works by composers as disparate as Biber, Bach, Rochberg, and Hartke, and this one looks at musical cross-influences between Italians and Americans (she's of Italian-Polish extraction) and features pieces composed over the last 700 years. The results here are never overly-academic and dispassionate, but fully engaged. And finding unity in our post-modern predicament is, in her case, not just a game of mix and match.

Makarski's choice of Tartini's *Sonata No. 7 in A* (from the composer's set of *26 piccole sonate*, composed in the mid-1700's) seems to emphasize the eternal affects of music; the work is lyric and dramatic, and on a technical level, based on a spontaneous-feeling series of variations, its *tema* being a *sarabanda*, a stately ground bass tune like the ever-durable *La Folia*, which has been set by everyone from Lully to Henze. Makarski's performance brings out its classic essence -- patrician, but full of coloristic variety -- with singing birdlike trills in its separate movements and variations.

*Due Studi* (1947), by Luigi Dallapiccola (1904-1975), also uses a *sarabanda* as its first movement, though this is a floating, haunted one with an especially exquisite mid section. The succeeding *fanfara e fuga* is brusque, violent, virtuosic, and -- though through-composed quasi-improvisatory. There's even a hint of some of the martial music in Berg's *Wozzeck*. Makarski and her partner here, Austrian pianist Thomas Larcher, are completely *simpatico*.

The violinist is on her own in *Elogio per un'ombra* (1971) by Goffredo Petrassi (b. 1904), which he dedicated to his fellow composer Casella (1883-1947). Though American composer Stephen Hartke's notes describe the work as "almost dream-like," Makarski is wide-awake here and completely up to the demands, which include perfectly executed trills, glissandi, sudden modal touches, and changes of texture, intonation, and harmonics. This piece's technical difficulty is right up there with Ravel's *Tzigane*, and should be played as much as that showpiece.

Nonagenarian Elliott Carter's *Riconoscenza per Goffredo Petrassi* (1984) is an homage to his friend, and a charming one at that (charm isn't a word usually associated with works by this composer). But this piece has a fluidity which sounds entirely natural and completely violinistic -- with irregularly spaced phrases forming its principal argument, intercut with other gestures. Quartets like the Juilliard -- in their two recordings of Carter's output for their configuration -- have made this composer's music seem important, but arid. Makarski makes *Riconoscenza* live and breathe, and she does this by applying a wide though sensitively calibrated range of color, and pinpoint intonation.

Though one would have thought that Carter was the real academic here, that dubious distinction goes to Luciano Berio (1926-), whose *Due Pezzi* (1951) is the driest piece on this program, with all the standard expressionist clichés: short, sharp canonic exchanges, and a general emotional vehemence. Written way before Berio "crossed over" to his more accessible style-quoting idiom, this work is still convincingly presented here by both violinist and pianist.

Like Berio in his mid-career revisionism, George Rochberg (b. 1918) caused a big stir when he bucked modernist dogma in his 60's compositions and said things like "The past refuses to be erased. Unlike Boulez, I will not praise amnesia." That stance seems a prophetic one, given that many composers now freely mix influences from yesterday with the multiple options available today. Rochberg's 51-part *Caprice Variations* (1971) re-imagines Paganini's *24th Caprice* for violin (there are four variations performed on this recording) in a variety of ways, and the out-of-order ones chosen by Makarski work fine as a set: reflective, delicate, melancholy. These work in consort with the closing *Lamento di Tristano* (from an anonymous 14th-century Italian manuscript), functioning as pure music -- memory suspended in time. The CD sound is present and remarkably lifelike.

# Calendar

January 7

North/South Consonance Chamber Orchestra in William Mayer's *East-West Surprise*, Randall Snyder's *Fictions*, Ana Lara's *Darkness Visible*, and Mark Alburger's *Symphony No. 1 in C Major*, Op. 21. Christ and St. Stephen's Church, New York, NY.

January 8

105th anniversary of the birth of Jaromir Weinberger.

Vakhtang Jordania conducts the American Symphony Orchestra in James Cohn's *Variations on The Wayfaring Stranger*, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's *Peanuts Gallery*, and the restored manuscript edition of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY.

January 10

An evening with John Adams. Herbst Theater, San Francisco, CA.

January 11

John Adams's *How Could This Happen (A Nativity Oratorio)* performed by the San Francisco Symphony, conducted by Kent Nagano. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

January 18

San Francisco Symphony in Stravinsky's *Violin Concerto* and Benjamin's *Palimpsest*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

January 19

Bartok's *Village Scenes*, Nyman's *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, and *A Poulenc Cabaret*. College of Marin, Kentfield, CA.

January 20

Boston Modern Orchestra Project, including Schuller's *Journey into Jazz*. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

January 21

Gunther Schuller conducts the Marin Symphony in music of Joplin and Blake. Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

ACF Salon, with Jay Sydeman, Lawrence Wayte, and Darcy Reynolds. Noe Valley Ministry, San Francisco, CA.

January 22

San Francisco Contemporary Players in music of Jonathan Harvey. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA.

Pianist Stephen Drury. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

January 25

Philip Bush performs Messiaen's *Visions de l'Amen*. Lewis Slater Concert Hall, Wabash, IN. Through February 4, Amado Recital Hall, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

*Celebrating Joaquin Rodrigo's 100th Birthday*. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

January 26

San Francisco Symphony in Harbison's *Music for 18 Winds*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Repeated January 27.

Violinist Magdalena Suhecka-Richter. Williams Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

January 27

Mark Alburger's *Antigone*, with Tisha Page, Harriet Page, Richard Mix, and Melissa Smith, plus music-theatre works by Erling Wold and Clark Suprynovies. Z Space, San Francisco, CA.

January 28

NEC Preparatory School Contemporary Festival, featuring the music of John Harbison. New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

Chen Yi's *Dunhuang Fantasy*. RLDS Temple, Independence, MO.

Composers Concordance presents Sebastian Currier's *Verge and Frames*, and Ornette Coleman's *Trinity* and *In Honor of NASA*. Miller Theatre, Columbia University, New York, NY.

January 29

*Gunther Schuller 75th-Birthday Celebration*. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory of Music, Boston, MA.

January 30

Chen Yi's *Shuo* Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY.

Houston Composers Alliance presents Kramlich's *Fanfare for Brass Quintet*, Thow's *Remembering*, Ochoa's *Whisper of a Moon God*, Paré's *Two Scenes from "Mirak"*, and Adams's *Chamber Symphony*. Duncan Recital Hall, Rice University, Houston, TX.

January 31

San Francisco Symphony in Prokofiev's *Symphony No. 1* ("Classical"). Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Callithumpian Consort in Hyla's *We Speak Etruscan*, and Zorn's *Game Pieces, Bequique, Hockey, and Cobra*. Brown Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

Philip Glass's 64th birthday. New York, NY.

# Chronicle

November 1

*College Music Society Annual Meeting.* Toronto, Canada. Through November 5.

Chen Yi's *Fiddle Suite.* Lucerne, Switzerland. Repeated November 24, Japan.

Les Percussions de Strasbourg in Xenakis's *Persephassa.* Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA.

NEC Symphony Orchestra. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

Juilliard Symphony in Adams's *The Chairman Dances.* Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY.

November 2

The National Symphony Orchestra presents the Washington D.C. premiere performances of Benjamin Lees's *Constellations for Orchestra*, conducted by Takao Kanayama. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, DC. Through November 4.

The Arman Trio presents Benjamin Lees's *Piano Trio No.2 ("Silent Voices").* St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Orlando, FL. Through November 8, Weill Recital Hall, New York (NY). "*Silent Voices . . .* was premiered at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC on May 31,1998. . . . Lees's other major Holocaust work, *Symphony No. 4 ("Memorial Candles")* was commissioned and premiered by the Dallas Symphony in 1985" [Internet release].

November 3

North American premiere of John Tavener's *The Bridegroom*, plus Pärt's *Fratres*, Britten's *Missa Brevis*, and Stravinsky's *Three Pieces for String Quartet* and *Concertino for String Quartet.* St. Paul's Greek Orthodox Church, Irvine, CA.

Accentus in Poulenc's *Motets Sur Un Temps De Penitence* and *Figure Humaine*, and Dusapin's *Granum Sinapi.* St. Ignatius Church, San Francisco, CA.

San Francisco Symphony in the music of Henze. Davies Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Guitarist/pianist Ernesto Diaz-Infante. Zeitgeist Gallery, Cambridge, MA. Through November 21, The Knitting Factory, New York, NY.

November 4

*CMS Concert*, including Stacy Garrop's *Trio* and Górecki's *Piano Trio.* Toronto, Canada.

Jennifer Ashworth performs Barber's *Nuvoletta.* Holy Names College, 3500 Mountain Blvd, Oakland, CA

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's *Millennium Fantasy for Piano and Orchestra* performed by the Battle Creek Symphony Orchestra. Battle Creek, MI.

*Sonic Boom 2000: Newband*, with music of Harry Partch, Elizabeth Brown, and Dean Drummond. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY.

The Contemporary Chamber Composers and Players with conductor Roupen Shakarian present three world premieres: *Synergies* by Brad Sherman, *From Mixdown* by Ben McAllister, and *Namaste* by Sarah Bassingthwaighe. The Moore Theatre, Seattle, WA.

November 5

*Celebrating Corigliano.* Concert Hall, Lehman College, New York, NY.

The Gogmagogs present *Gobbledygook.* Miller Theater, Columbia University, New York, NY.

November 6

Steve Reich, with Sarah Cahill, discusses his *Writings on Music 1965-2000.* David Tanenbaum and Gyan Riley perform *Nagoya Guitars.* Hertz Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

Laura Carmichael, Silvia Matheus, and Pamela Z in improvisations and music by Chen Yi, Jorge Liderman, and Larry Austin. Merkin Hall, New York, NY.

November 7

*Joyce Event.* Merce Cunningham Dance Company in music of Paul De Marinis and Meredith Monk, the latter performed by the composer and Theo Bleckmann. Joyce Theater, New York, NY. "Merce Cunningham is the wizard of our age . . . [H]e put together sequences of unrelated choreography and added electronic music and the neo-archaic plaint of composer-choreographer Meredith Monk. . . . [This *Event*], which is the 668th since 1964, will never be seen with the same ingredients again"

November 8

Berkeley Contemporary Chamber Players in Steve Reich's *Nagoya Guitars*, *Piano Phase*, *Music for Pieces of Wood*, *Electric Counterpoint*, and *Four Organs.* Hertz Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

Pianist Jon Sakata. Williams Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

November 9

San Francisco Symphony in Peter Maxwell Davies's *Cross Lane Fair.* Davies Hall, San Francisco, CA. "It isn't every day you see a juggling display on the stage of Davies Symphony Hall in the middle of a subscription concert by the San Francisco Symphony. . . . The balls came out . . . midway through Cross Lane Fair . . . Davies's evocation of the Lancashire country fairs of his childhood" [Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, 9/10/00].

Amanda Moody in her *Serial Murderess*, with music by Clark Suprynowitz, and oboist Mark Alburger. Venue 9, San Francisco, CA. Through December 4. "[With composer Clark Suprynowitz, Moody creates a compelling spell . . . . As oboist Mark Alburger takes his place at the rear of the stage and utters a sinuous wail, Moody launches into the first piece. . . . Moody descends and changes costume while singing an old ballad about another murderess in a strong, supple voice. . . . [She] makes her segue to Joan, the contemporary figure, with a stirring a cappella rendition of a spiritual ("I'm Going Home") that culminates in a heart-stopping, fervid falsetto wail" [Robert Hurwitz, San Francisco Examiner, 11/10/00].

Callithumpian Consort. Williams Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

Yoko Ono. Japan Society, New York, NY.

November 10

West Coast premiere of Elliott Carter's *What's Next?*, plus Ronald Bruce Smith's *Constellation*. Hertz Hall, Berkeley, CA. "Elliott Carter waited until he was 90 to write his first opera, a brisk little one-acter titled *What's Next?* Too bad he couldn't have held out indefinitely. . . . [The work] is marked by the same Byzantine complexity that has always characterized the composer's writing, a mandarin aesthetic whose target audience can only be the academic analyst armed with graph paper and a calculator. It boasts his perennial avoidance -- as if on principle -- of any hint of beauty, expressive content or sensual delight. It remains as resolutely standoffish toward the listener's merely human sensibilities as a lump of granite. . . . Yet because it is an opera, there is something singularly horrifying about this new score, something that goes beyond the simple gloom that Carter's work always inspires. . . . [V]ocal sounds are rooted in the human body, and its concerns are those of human existence -- love, pain, hope, pleasure, death. Those are precisely the elements that Carter systematically leaches out of his music in his pursuit of the abstract, the timeless, the transcendently rational. It's a dehumanizing brand of art that he practices, and to see it applied to the warm-blooded genre of opera is enough to chill the bones. . . . With its chilly, meaningless libretto (by New York Times music critic Paul Griffiths) and its disdain for dramatic shape, it amounts to a mathematical bagatelle. . . . What's striking, in a way, is to observe one's own expectations diminishing moment by moment as the 40-minute work progresses. Just as a parched castaway in the desert is grateful for a thimbleful of rainwater, so the listener's ear will seize upon an occasional sequence of notes or a burst of nonphonetic text-setting and cry, 'Aha! Music at last!' But the illusion quickly evaporates" [Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, 11/13/00].

Hewlett-Packard Symphony in Anderson's *Minnesota Swale*, Kimmel's *Denali Seasons*, and Gellis's *Duplex*. Oak Room, Hewlett-Packard, Cupertino, CA.

*Lore of Moments*, with Pauline Oliveros. Mills College, Oakland, CA.

West Coast premiere of Mikel Rouse's *Failing Kansas*. Orange County Performing Arts Center, CA.

*Roundtable Discussion: The Music of Gunther Schuller*. Williams Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

Swarthmore College Wind Ensemble. Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

Seattle Chamber Players and Frederic Rzewski in his *Andante con Moto*, *North American Ballads*, and *Spots*. Benaroya Hall, Seattle, WA. "Since 1977 Rzewski has been Professor of Composition at the Conservatoire Royal de Musique in Liege, Belgium. He has also taught at the Yale School of Music, the University of Cincinnati, the State University of New York at Buffalo, the California Institute of the Arts, the University of California at San Diego, Mills College, the Royal Conservatory of the Hague, the Hochschule der Kuenste in Berlin, and the Hochschule für Musik in Karlsruhe" [Internet release].

November 11

Steve Reich and Musicians in *Clapping Music*, *Electric Counterpoint*, *Drumming (Part 1)*, *Nagoya Marimbas*, and *Sextet*. Hertz Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA. "Is Steve Reich really America's greatest living composer, as some partisans claim? Could be -- at least, I'm not sure who's got much of a counterclaim. He's certainly one of the most individual, venturesome, engaged and just plain smart composer at work in these United States" [Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, 11/13/00].

Empyrean Ensemble. Julia Morgan Theater, Berkeley, CA. Repeated November 12, Wyatt Pavilion, University of California, Davis.

NACUSA Concert, with the San Jose Choral Project. Daniel Leo Simpson's *Berceuse*, Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *Two Songs*, *Hosanna*, and *Flowers by the Sea*; Rosemary Byers's *To a Cat* and *She Walks in Beauty*; Brian Holmes's *Six Lullabies*, *Jolly Jankin*, and *Let Evening Come*; Lori Griswold's *Noel*, Mark Alburger's *Aerial Requiem*; and Owen Lee's *Sanctus*. Art Center, Palo Alto, CA.

*Microthon 2000*, including Kyle Gann's *Do You Know Who I Am?*, Anton Rovner's *Jonny Spielt Auf*, Lou Harrison's *Symphony in Free Style*, Johnny Reinhard's *Urartu* and *Ultra*, Philip Corner's *Two Timeless Tone-Scenes*, the premieres of Harry Partch's *Mendota Night* and *The Incident at Drake's Bay* (1953), and Ivan Wyschnegradsky's *Procession de la Via* and *Meditation*. Quaker Meeting House, New York, NY.

Orchestra 20001 in Gerald Levinson's *For the Morning of the World*, Maurice Delage's *Four Hindu Poems*, Lou Harrison's *Concerto in Slendro*, and Bright Sheng's *Two Poems from the Sung Dynasty*. Philadelphia, PA. Repeated November 12, Swarthmore.

The Esoterics celebrate the 100th birthday of Aaron Copland. Queen Anne Christian Church, Seattle, WA. Repeated November 12.

*Stockholm to Seattle: A Concert of New Electroacoustic Music*. Brechemin Auditorium, Seattle, WA.

November 12

Ellington Society presents a birthday tribute to Billy Strayhorn. Building C-355, Ft. Mason Center, San Francisco, CA.

King Crimson. Supper Club, New York, NY.

*Duo Concertante: 20th-Century Milestone for Violin and Piano*, with Sheila Reinhold and Max Lifchitz. Christ and St. Stephen's Church, New York, NY.



November 13

NEC Chamber Orchestra. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

November 14

NEC Contemporary Ensemble. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

Chen Yi. Miami University, OH.

November 15

Rebecca Bogart in Griffes's *The Fountain of the Aqua Poala*, Manna-Zucca's *Valse Brillante*, Joplin's *Solace*, Copland's *Rodeo*, and Gould's *Boogie-Woogie Etude*; Patti Deuter in Debussy's *La Plus que Lente*; and Molly Axtmann in her *Preludes, Six-Three*, and *Six-Five*. Strings, Emeryville, CA.

Ensemble 21, with pianist Marilyn Nonken and mezzo soprano Mary Nessinger, performs works of Jean Barraqué: *Sonate pour piano* (1952), *Etude* (1953), and *Séquence* (1955). Miller Theatre, Columbia University, New York, NY. "The music of Jean Barraqué (1928-1973) is voluptuous, imposing, and beautiful. Ensemble 21 pianist and Artistic Director Marilyn Nonken begins the program with the daunting *Sonate pour piano*, a relentlessly virtuosic work lasting over 40 minutes. . . . The second half of the concert begins with *Etude*, Barraqué's only work for electronic tape. While it is considerably shorter than the composer's other pieces, it reveals his keen ear for timbral color and acute sense of formal balance. Conductor Jeffrey Milarsky will lead the Ensemble 21 players in a performance of the sensual and daring *Séquence*, with the remarkable young mezzo-soprano Mary Nessinger. A setting of texts by Nietzsche, *Séquence* is brilliantly scored for a massive battery of percussion, piano, harp, celeste, and strings. Ensemble 21 delivers a rare evening of extraordinary works. Jean Barraqué sang in the choir at Notre Dame and studied music theory with Jean Langlais. In 1948 he attended Olivier Messiaen's classes at the Paris Conservatoire and became deeply influenced by the intellectual atmosphere and the musical inventiveness that Messiaen encouraged. Perhaps most important, however, was Barraqué's contact with serial techniques that he would utilize in the *Sonata* and refine and reinvent throughout his career. After completing the *Sonata*, he became involved with Pierre Schaeffer's electronic studio at Radio France. . . Barraqué's output slowed considerably after his next two pieces, *le temps restitue* (1957, reorchestrated in 1968) and *...au delà du hasard* (1959) both because of personal problems and creative uncertainty. 'Art must evolve toward death, must be achieved through "endless unachievement",' said Barraqué, acknowledging the difficulty of continuing his work. The two pieces that were to follow, *Chant apres chant* (1966) and a concerto for clarinet (1968), were Barraqué's last" [Internet release]. "[S]mall but crucial [will be the] output of Jean Barraqué . . . . Profoundly pessimistic and troubled by ill health, Barraqué died in 1973 at 45. Like his near-contemporary Pierre Boulez, he was a convinced progressive, but at the same time he felt an allegiance to the scale and the rhetoric of the great 19th-century composers, especially Beethoven. He was a modernist with an old-fashioned sense of music as powerful human communication. He was also realistic enough to anticipate neglect, from which he contrived to benefit: it gave him the freedom to be demanding. . . . Sonata for piano [was] played by Marilyn Nonken in a performance that was unusually but persuasively light in texture and skipping in motion. . . . The last note, instead of being the final nail in the coffin, was a bright point of light and promise. . . . Barraqué's electronic Etude, dating from the same period as the Sonata, 1951-53 . . . shar[es] its combination of despair and exhilaration. [T]he slightly later Séquence [is] for soprano embedded in an ensemble of percussive instruments with violin and cello. Mary Nessinger was agile and graceful in the solo part . . . and Jeffrey Milarsky conducted his players cleanly, strongly and directly through this thunderstorm of a score" [Paul Griffiths, The New York Times, 11/22/00].

American Accent in John Harbison's *Fantasy Duo* for violin and piano, George Perle's *Monody No. 1* for solo flute, Judith Lang Zaimont's *Zones - Piano Trio No. 2*, Sofia Gubaidulina's *Klänge des Waldes* and *Allegro Rustico*, both for flute and piano and Ned Rorem's *Bright Music* for flute, 2 violins, cello and piano. Merkin Hall, New York, NY.

November 16

Schoenberg's *Cabaret Songs*. San Francisco Conservatory, San Francisco, CA.

NEC Wind Ensemble. New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

November 17

Rodney Lister's *Mama Stamberg's Cranberry Relish*. Morning Edition, NPR.

Choreographer Lily Cai's *String Calligraphy*, with music by Gang Situ performed by the New Century Chamber Orchestra, the Alexander String Quartet, and erhu player Jie-Bing Chen. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA.

*Nothing*, with Stephen Drury. Williams Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's *Millennium Fantasy for Piano and Orchestra* performed by the El Paso Symphony Orchestra. El Paso, TX. Repeated November 18.

November 18

*Bay Area Composer's Symposium*, featuring Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *Watchers of Stone* and Gang Situ's *Concerto for Erhu and Cello*. San Rafael, CA.

Reinbert de Leeuw and the Schoenberg Ensemble in the U.S. premiere of Kagel's *Kidnapping in the Concert Hall*, plus *Midnight Piece*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "The stage is set for a large chorus and symphony orchestra to perform. But only about half the performers are in place when the conductor arrives, and he is evidently in distress. . . . Kagel . . . has been creating dramas in concert halls for nearly half a century: *Match*, a kind of sports contest for rival cellists with percussionist referee; *Atem (Breath)*, a solo for a breathless trombonist . . . . [W]ith a nod to Mozart's *Abduction From the Seraglio*, [Kagel's] abduction [involves] orchestral players, chorus members and soloists . . . prevented from performing because they are being held by a kidnapper. Several times, the kidnapper calls up the conductor, making threats and demands. Noises coming from the corridors outside the hall indicate that emergency services have arrived. Meanwhile, the conductor tries to go on with some kind of musical performance. He knows he is supposed to be conducting an oratorio based on some of the brilliant, strange and fugitive poems of Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (a work Mr. Kagel has long been dreaming of). But in the absence of half the performers and under conditions of panic and fear, another kind of music emerges: jittery, subject to sudden changes of mood" [Paul Griffiths, *The New York Times*, 11/12/00]. "[M]ost of an orchestra is held in a small rehearsal room, connected to the conductor by phone. How will the show go on? . . . Kagel's *Midnight Piece* [is] based on the last letters of Schumann" [The New Yorker, 11/20/00]. "Kagel . . . has written plays and radio dramas, made 18 films and composed numerous theatrical works for the concert hall. . . . The dramatic conceit . . . is at once impish fun and fraught with meaning. . . . [T]he conductor . . . must keep taking phone calls from the kidnapers, who issue vague demands in foul language. Now and then the sounds of sirens from police vans outside the hall intrude. . . . Musically, the score is captivating. As in his other works, Mr. Kagel has fashioned a thick chromatic tonality and pungent atonality, as well as a keen ear for sheer sound and color, into an eclectic, fresh and bracing musical language. The vivid choral writing varies constantly, from plaintive multi-part harmony, to episodes of every-which-way counterpoint, to eerily hummed declamations. For all the density and turbulence of the piece, the music amazingly conveys the sense of a work with gaping holes in it, due of course to the 'missing' performers. That said, it lasts an hour, and the dramatic sweep is not quite right. The 10 phone calls become forced jokes. Part of the problem was that Mr. de Leeuw, a brilliant and serious-minded musician, is no actor. His delivery of the conductor's lines was notably uncomfortable. And he did not heed all of Mr. Kagel's stage directions. At the end, one by one, the performers are supposed to leave the hall, and the performance falls to pieces, a homage, no doubt, to Haydn's "Farewell" Symphony. But these players stayed in place. No one could fault Mr. de Leeuw's musical performance, though, which was utterly impressive, as was Christoph Momberger, as the disheveled tenor soloist who escapes the kidnapers and comes on stage to report on the ordeal. . . . Kagel sets the text [of *Midnight Piece* ("*Mitternachtsstück*") in a sort of song-speech, and this, as well as the subject matter, nod at Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. The score is haunting, but languid and self-contained. At 45 minutes, it, too, lacks dramatic variety. Mr. Kagel is a major composer. But these pieces could have used the input of a crusty stage director not afraid to prune away and shape up the shows" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 11/22/00].

The Northwest Symphony Orchestra presents *Northwest Composers Concert One*. Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA.

November 19

Marin Symphony in an all-Copland program. San Rafael, CA. Repeated November 21.

*Night of 100 Guitars*. Brant's *Rosewood* and *Crossing the Bridge -- Before You Come to It*, Reich's *Electric Counterpoint* and *Nagoya Guitars*, J.A. Lennon's *Suite for Guitar*, and Riley's *Pie Dad*. Veteran's Memorial Auditorium, Santa Cruz, CA.

Pianist Gabriel Chodos. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

The American Symphony Orchestra in the premieres of Glass's *Double Concerto for Timpani and Orchestra* and Farberman's *Cello Concerto*, plus Krenek's *Symphony No. 2*. New York, NY.

November 20

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the Russian National Orchestra in an all-Stravinsky program of *The Rite of Spring*, *Apollon musagète*, and *Symphony in Three Movements*. Moscow, Russia. "The two later Stravinsky scores . . . were mostly unfamiliar to both the orchestra -- which had never performed either work -- and to its audience" [Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, 11/21/00]. "I know enough [Russian] to say 'Five bars before letter G,' but aside from that we worked a lot in Italian, French and German. What bits and pieces of Russian I knew made them laugh. And of course, the fact that I know some, uh, colorful expressions went a long way" [Michael Tilson Thomas, San Francisco Chronicle, 11/21/00].

Massachusetts Wind Ensemble. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

November 21

New Juilliard Ensemble. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY.

November 22

Gunther Schuller's 75th birthday.

San Francisco Symphony in the music of Rautavaara. Davies Hall, San Francisco, CA.

November 24

Robert Weiss's *Natalia: The Proposal*, with Tisha Page, directed by Harriet March Page. Dominican College, San Rafael, CA. Through December 10.

November 26

Chen Yi's *Momentum* performed by the Hong Kong Sinfonietta. Hong Kong.

Sonos Handbell Ensemble. First Congregational Church, Berkeley, CA.

November 28

Composers, Inc in McLoskey's *Wild Bells* and Ince's *Like, Like Not*. Green Room, Veterans Building, San Francisco, CA.

Veronica Jochum performs Schuller's *Sonata Fantasia*. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

Carter's *Quintet for Woodwinds* and *Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Cello, and Harpsichord*. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY.

*Ronald Roseman Memorial Concert*, with the New York Woodwind Quintet and pianist Gilbert Kalish. Paul Hall, New York, NY.

Fred Ho's "sheroic" opera, *Warrior Sisters*. The Kitchen, New York, NY. Through December 2. "It's not every day that you run into a musician who joins a protean range of talents -- as a composer, saxophonist, writer, and bandleader -- with a commitment to Marxist ideology. Ho . . . combines the influences of Chinese opera, Asian martial arts, American jazz, and West African praise songs . . . [with] social justice, mixed in with a healthy dose of leftwing agitprop" [The New Yorker, 11/27/00].

November 29

Michael Tilson Thomas conducts the San Francisco Symphony in Takemitsu's *Ceremonial* and Berg's *Violin Concerto*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through December 2.

Guitarist David Leisner. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

November 30

Nancy Karp + Dancers in the premiere of *KALASAM*, with music by Paul Drescher. Cowell Theatre, San Francisco, CA.

John Corigliano's *Symphony No. 2* performed by the Boston Symphony. Boston, MA.

NEC Honors Orchestra in Schuller's *Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee*. Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory, Boston, MA.

# Writers

MARK ALBURGER began playing the oboe and composing in association with Dorothy and James Freeman, George Crumb, and Richard Wernick. He studied with Karl Kohn at Pomona College; Joan Panetti and Gerald Levinson at Swarthmore College (B.A.); Jules Langert at Dominican College (M.A.); Roland Jackson at Claremont Graduate University (Ph.D.); and Terry Riley. Alburger writes for Commuter Times and is published by New Music. He is Editor-Publisher of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC, and has interviewed numerous composers, including Charles Amirkhanian, Henry Brant, Earle Brown, Philip Glass, Lou Harrison, Alan Hovhaness, Meredith Monk, Pauline Oliveros, Steve Reich, and Frederick Rzewski. An ASCAP composer, his Symphony No. 1 is to be performed by the North/South Consonance Ensemble on January 7 at Christ and St. Stephen's Church in New York. Excerpts from Alburger's *Antigone* will be presented by Tisha Page, Harriet March Page, Richard Mix, and Melissa Smith on January 27 at San Francisco's Z Space.

DAVID CLEARY's music has been played throughout the U.S. and abroad, including performances at Tanglewood and by Alea II and Dinosaur Annex. A member of Composers in Red Sneaker, he has won many awards and grants, including the Harvey Gaul Contest, an Ella Lyman Cabot Trust Grant, and a MacDowell residence. He is a staff critic for The New Music Connoisseur and 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC. His article on composing careers is published by Gale Research and he has contributed CD reviews to the latest *All Music Guide to Rock*. His music appears on the Centaur and Vienna Modern Masters labels, and his bio may be found in many *Who's Who* books.

PATTI DEUTER is Associate Editor of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC and a Bay Area pianist.

WALT ERICKSON is a freelance writer/critic living in New York City.

Soprano HARRIET MARCH PAGE is the Director of Goat Hall Productions and Assistant Editor of 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.

PAMELA Z is a San Francisco-based composer/performer working in both the "knob-twiddling" and gestural areas of new music and does a little writing on the side. Her website address is [www.pamelaz.com](http://www.pamelaz.com)

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